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DE RUEHIN #1306/01 3090827
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 050827Z NOV 09
FM AIT TAIPEI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 2628
INFO RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 9473
RUEHHK/AMCONSUL HONG KONG 0887

UNCLAS AIT TAIPEI 001306

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DEPARTMENT PASS AIT/WASHINGTON

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [OPRC](#) [KMDR](#) [KPAO](#) [TW](#)
SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: U.S. BEEF IMPORTS TO TAIWAN

¶1. Summary: Taiwan's major Chinese-language dailies focused news coverage November 5 on Premier Wu Den-yih, who was reported to have traveled abroad with a local criminal gang leader in 2008; on the controversy and aftermath of the Taiwan government's decision to allow the import of U.S. beef and beef products; and on developments in cross-Straits relations.

¶2. Editorials and op-ed pieces in Taiwan's dailies continued to focus on the controversy caused by U.S. beef imports. An op-ed in the mass-circulation "Apple Daily" alleged that the Ma administration's decision to allow U.S. beef imports was a move to compensate the United States for keeping quiet about a series of actions by the Ma administration to damage human rights in Taiwan. An editorial in the KMT-leaning "China Times" said the Legislative Yuan's move to amend the law to block the import of U.S. beef offal and ground beef has shown disrespect to the United States and will create risks in future U.S.-Taiwan relations. A separate "China Times" op-ed piece said the U.S. beef controversy is no longer an issue about food safety but an extension of nationalistic awareness, after the WTO talks, to oppose opening Taiwan's market to any imported agricultural products. An editorial in the China-focused "Want Daily," however, criticized a statement recently issued by the Office of U.S. Trade Representative and U.S. Department of Agriculture on U.S. beef imports to Taiwan. The article said Washington has put additional pressure on the Ma administration, which has been trying its utmost to defend U.S. beef imports, and the move does not meet the interests of Taiwan and the United States. An editorial in the pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times" lambasted the Ma administration's opaque and peremptory handling of the U.S. beef imports and said the same model will likely be applied when Taiwan talks with China about an Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement. End summary.

A) "U.S. Beef, Taiwan's Human Rights"

Huang Chi-yao, a visiting researcher at the Max-Planck Institute, opined in the mass-circulation "Apple Daily" [circulation: 520,000] (11/5):

"... First, the major problem with the 'Protocol on U.S. Beef Imports to Taiwan' is that the Ma administration has unexpectedly handed the right over the health of its people to another country. [The Ma administration] has surprisingly handed [the right over to] the United States to determine whether the imported [U.S.] beef [carries the risk of] mad cow disease, abandoning the line of defense for the safety [of its people] by merely saying that [Taiwan] will stop importing [the U.S. beef] should any such disease cases be uncovered. [The move] is akin to [allowing others to] run experiments on the living bodies [of the Taiwan people] while there is no preventive mechanism set up in advance. ... What's even worse is that Taiwan does not have the right to determine and call a halt to the beef imports!

"... Therefore, if [we are to] talk about opening [Taiwan's market to U.S. beef], it has to be the United States that provides evidence showing that its exported beef carries no disease, which will then

be examined and verified by Taiwan before it is allowed to be imported. ... Also, based on Taiwan's public health concerns, Taiwan has the right to ban any beef imports that carry the risk of contracting mad cow disease. ... Basically, the Ma administration's premeditated decision to allow the import of U.S. beef was a move to compensate the United States for keeping quiet about a series of actions taken since Ma assumed office to damage [Taiwan's] administrative and judicial human rights. In that vein, the decision to open Taiwan's market to U.S. beef was also made at the expense of harming Taiwan's human rights, which will hardly win emotional recognition from the Taiwan people and will therefore affect its marketing on the island. As such, the resolution lies in a stronger push for the Ma administration to improve [Taiwan's] human rights and rectify its China-tilting policy. Only when democracy and human rights are realized [in Taiwan] can the value of U.S. beef be truly demonstrated!"

B) "Be Careful Not to Get Stuck in a Situation 'from Which There Is No Easy Retreat'"

The KMT-leaning "China Times" [circulation: 120,000] editorialized (11/5):

"... Even though the talks this time over the import of U.S. beef offal and ground beef had been going on for seventeen months, [the Ma administration] has failed to properly communicate with the legislative body before it made the final decision. Even high-ranking decision-making officials in the Executive Yuan were kept in the dark. Anything that [the Ma administration] did after that to try to fix the problem already seemed farfetched. Lawmakers across party lines have all joined together to seek to amend the law to block the import of U.S. beef offal and ground beef. [Such a development] has not only slapped the face of the [Taiwan]

representatives [talking with the United States] but has also shown disrespect to the big boss the United States. Surely this will create some risks in terms of Taiwan-U.S. relations in the future. ..."

C) "Different Decision-making Models, but Same Predicament"

Chan Shou-chung, a former congressional aide, opined in the KMT-leaning "China Times" [circulation: 120,000] (11/5):

"... It is a fact well-known to everyone that opening Taiwan's market to U.S. beef is one of the agricultural products that Taiwan has to sacrifice in the wake of Taiwan's participation in the World Trade Organization (WTO). The controversy over U.S. beef is no longer a matter about food safety or [lack of] communication about [government] policies. Instead, it is an extension of nationalistic awareness, after the WTO talks, to oppose opening [Taiwan's market] to any [imported] agricultural products, and this is the same case for Taiwan, Japan and South Korea. ... Nonetheless, as long as [Taiwan imposes] limitations, the U.S. pressure to open [the Taiwan market] will remain constant, and 'full opening' is a decision that will have to be made sooner or later. ..."

D) "The United States Should Learn from Hu Jintao's Political Wisdom"

The China-focused "Want Daily" [circulation: 10,000] editorialized (11/5):

"The U.S. Trade Representative Office (USTR) and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (DOA) said the other day that the United States has started to review whether Taiwan's measures to examine the imports [of U.S. beef] are consistent with the 'Protocol on U.S. Beef Imports to Taiwan' and with relevant international standards. Given that the [Taiwan] government's decision to expand U.S. beef imports has become a political issue, the U.S. move was akin to making a bad situation worse, putting more pressure on President Ma Ying-jeou. Judging from the bigger picture of the Asia-Pacific, Washington's additional pressure on the Ma administration has not only failed to meet Taiwan's interests but also those of the Taiwan Strait and the United States. ..."

"... [USTR's] statement sounds mild, but in fact it carries the meaning of a threat. It states very clearly that [Washington] will

put pressure on the Ma administration, and it has the sense that the United States will retaliate as long as [Taiwan] fails to cease [imposing] the 'additional domestic measures.' ... Also, the USTR and DOA's statement on the controversy of U.S. beef is not kind and considerate to the Ma administration, which has been trying its utmost to defend the expanded imports of U.S. beef. ...

"Finally, the Ma administration's grand strategy toward Taiwan, the United States and China is to strengthen trade and economic relations with mainland China on the one hand and, on the other, to reinforce the United States' security commitment toward Taiwan. The U.S. beef is a non-traditional safety issue, and of course it is very important, but it should not harm the normal development of Taiwan-U.S.-China relations. In terms of the Dalai Lama's recent visit to Taiwan, even though Beijing was displeased, it did not vent its anger against the Ma administration which offered the Dalai Lama a visa. Perhaps the Obama administration should learn from the political wisdom of [Chinese President] Hu Jintao."

E) "Can ECFA Negotiations Be Trusted?"

The pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times" [circulation: 30,000] editorialized (11/5):

"The government's atrocious handling of the expansion of US beef imports -- opaque, peremptory and confused, regardless of the merits of the products -- is becoming a real cause for concern in terms of the bigger picture: cross-strait detente, and particularly a proposed economic pact with China. ... One legacy of the US beef controversy is that many more people have little or no confidence in the government's ability to negotiate with China without jeopardizing Taiwan's interests. Case in point No. 1: Department of Health Minister Yaung Chih-liang had promised that only US bone-in beef would be allowed into the country. But it turned out the protocol with the US also allowed ground beef, intestines, brains and spinal cords. ...

"In an attempt to ease anger at the relaxation of US beef imports, the government said it would implement strict safety checks to ensure that imports are not contaminated. This rather tricky -- not to mention ad hoc -- approach to administrative duties can only prompt doubts as to whether an ECFA would trigger a range of policy U-turns and last-minute, superficial customs-control measures -- and all in the absence of adequate information for the public, let alone a public consensus. Case in point No. 2: Premier Wu Den-yih said

the signing of any cross-strait agreements, including an ECFA, would respect the need for public support and legislative oversight. But if the government can act in obvious defiance of a legislative resolution passed in 2006 that required the Department of Health to report in detail to the legislature before lifting bans on US beef, what is to be made of such commitments from the premier?

"On Oct. 23, the department announced that Taiwan had signed an accord with the US agreeing to relax curbs on US bone-in beef and cow organs. Yet, as of yesterday, a majority of the public is being kept in the dark on the details of the protocol because the government has not issued a Chinese translation. Once again, this cavalier attitude toward ordinary people only raises suspicion as to how open and trustworthy any agreements between this China-friendly government and Beijing will be. The government set a precedent of obliviousness by suddenly easing bans on US beef imports without due preparation and public consultation. This sorry episode is now signaling the need to place sustained pressure on the government to keep its ECFA dealings transparent. Otherwise, the next sudden announcement from the government might be a very destructive one, indeed."

STANTON